DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 062 945 HE 003 079

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TITLE Ten Guidelines for Principals and A Free Student Press.
INSTITUTION Virginia Univ., Charlottesville. School of Education.
PUB DATE Feb 72
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Higher Education; Journalism; Newspapers; *School Newspapers; *School Publications; *Secondary Education; *Student Publications

ABSTRACT

This paper presents guidelines for the chief student personnel administrator in implementing editorial policies related to freedom of expression in the sanctioned student newspaper. The guidelines are: (1) the function of the student newspaper should be clearly defined and agreed upon by the students, faculty and administrators; (2) the function of the student newspaper, as it relates to student freedom of expression, is parallel with the function of the commercial newspaper; (3) editorial freedom of expression is a basic requirement for the student newspaper; (4) the student newspaper should not be considered as an official publication of its school; (5) students do not forfeit their constitutional rights of freedom of expression; (6) student newspaper editorial policies which promote the lawful educational goals of the school are viewed as desirable by the courts; (7) a publications board offers the best method for providing guidance and leadership for the student newspaper activity; (8) student newspaper editorial freedom of expression requires student responsibility for presenting news and opinion accurately, fairly, and completely; (9) a professionally competent adviser for the student newspaper staff is desirable for both students and the administration; and (10) the student newspaper is primarily a medium of communication for students. (HS)

REPORT SERIES:

TEN GUIDELINES FOR PRINCIPALS AND A FREE STUDENT PRESS

by

Annette Gibbs

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ED Publications
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February 1972

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FOREWORD

"The purpose of this study has been to devise guidelines for the chief student presonnel administrator in implementing editorial policies related to freedom of expression in the . . . sanctioned student newspaper."

When Annette Gibbs stated this first in her dissertation and then in Syllabus, Winter 1970-71, she was referring to college students and administrators. She believes, as we do, that the guidelines apply equally well to public high school students and principals.

The following article is based on Gibbs' doctoral study "Guidelines for the Chief Student Personnel Administrator in Implementing Editorial Policies Related to Freedom of Expression in Sanctioned Student Newspapers of State Colleges." Completed at Florida State University, the original paper is available on microfilm from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Dr. Gibbs is currently Associate Dean of Students at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville.

James H. Bash
Director
ED Publications
April 1972

Student personnel administrators are finding themselves increasingly involved in issues relating to student freedom of expression. Freedom of expression in the student newspaper has been a primary issue in many schools as student editors have argued for a more influential part in the educational process. Conflicts concerning newspaper editorial policies exist, in some measure, because student editors and school administrators are not in agreement as to which topics and ideas should be presented or discussed in the student newspaper. Further, it is apparent that student newspaper activity in many high schools is not considered desirable by all elements of the community. This study was designed, therefore, to develop guidelines by which the student personnel administrator can work effectively with the high school's sanctioned student newspaper editorial policies relating to student freedom of expression.

Educational, legal, administrative, and journalistic sources were studied to acquire an understanding of the topic under consideration. The data were arranged in these categories: (1) The function of the student newspaper, (2) The status of the student newspaper, (3) Legal decisions handed down by the state and federal courts which apply to the student newspaper, (4) Official positions of concerned organizations which relate to student freedom of expression, and (5) Conflicts and issues to be resolved.

The guidelines which emerged from the study relate to the three questions:

(1) What should be the function of the school sanctioned student newspaper?
(2) What are the legal boundaries which pertain to editorial policies of the student newspaper in relation to student freedom of expression and with which the public school must be concerned?
(3) What, if any, journalistic ethics or obligations should pertain to the student newspaper?

Guidelines one through three relate to the first questions; guidelines four through six are concerned with the second question; and guidelines seven through ten pertain to the third question.

GUIDELINES RELATING TO STUDENT NEWSPAPER FUNCTION

1. <u>The function of the student newspaper should be clearly defined and agreed</u>

upon by the students, faculty, and administrators within the high school community.

It is evident that if students, faculty, and administrators will define the function of the newspaper, many of the present problems can be eliminated. By clearly defining the function of a student newspaper, the students, faculty, and administrators would then be able to work on the same temperate base with regard to student newspaper activities. Administrative actions to censure the student newspaper would conceivably decline, and students would learn through participating in an environment such as exists ideally in American society, an environment in which citizens are free to explore, inquire, express and form ideas and opinion.

2. The function of the student newspaper, as it relates to student freedom of expression, is parallel with the function of the commercial newspaper, i.e., both serve to inform, educate, and entertain their readers.

The findings of this study show that specific functions of the student newspaper are: (1) To provide learning experiences through student participation in the democratic process of investigation and inquiry, the communication of facts and opinion, and the debate of issues and opinion; (2) To provide services for students through publicizing those events, activities, and expressions of opinion which are of interest to them; and (3) To promote activities and spirit through providing a local forum for students.

The courts likewise view the student newspaper as a medium of communication for students, just as the commercial newspaper serves as a means of communication for community readers. Evidence indicates that the courts generally consider rulings which apply to the commercial newspaper also to apply to the student newspaper.

3. Editorial freedom of expression is a basic requirement for the student newspaper.

Of the eight documents and reports endorsed by seventeen separate school organizations and examined in this study, six proclaim explicitly that the function of the student newspaper is to provide a channel for free and responsible coverage of news, issues, and opinions of student interest. Not one of the eight official positions either states or implies that news, issues and opinion should be limited to those existing within the school.

All eight of the positions reviewed call for student editorial freedom in discussing the events, issues, and opinions which are of student interest and concern. Four of the eight positions state or imply that the student editor should have the authority to determine the materials to be printed in the newspaper.

The remaining four do not consider the editor's specific authority. They are concerned, instead, with creating an atmosphere for uninhibited student investigation, exploration, discussion, and debate as afforded by the newspaper.

GUIDELINES CONCERNED WITH LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4. The student newspaper should not be considered as an official publication of its high school.

A review of legal actions shows that the courts have been consistent in viewing the student newspaper as a publication for students. In addition, seven of the eight official positions reviewed in this study emphasize the desirability for the student newspaper to state explicitly that it is not an official publication of the institution, and that it does not necessarily represent the views and opinion of the administration, faculty, or student.

5. Students do not forfeit their constitutional rights of freedom of expression.

While students possess the same constitutional rights of freedom of expression as any other American citizen, their rights of free expression may be modified by reasonably imposed institutional regulations, i.e., those policies which show no evidence of discrimination, deprival of due process, or arbitary or capricious action. Individual rights of freedom of expression must yield when such rights deprive other students of their equal rights of expression. Institutional maintenance of order and proper decorum are also within the lawful prerogative of administrators, and student rights to free speech must conform to requirements of appropriate order and decorum in the operation of the high school.

6. Student newspaper editorial policies which promote the lawful educational goals of the school are viewed as desirable by the courts.

Procedures designed to prevent interference in order and propriety, reasonably imposed, are desirable, and procedures which protect the constitutional rights of freedom of speech, as such rights relate to all students, are considered necessary by the courts.

JOURNALISTIC ETHICS OR OBLIGATIONS

7. A publications board, composed of students, faculty, and administrators, offers the best method for providing guidance and leadership for the student newspaper activity.

A publications board, representing the three primary segments of the high school community (i.e., administrators, faculty, and students), should be responsible for defining the function of the student newspaper, determining the policies for insuring that the newspaper serves all the students, and providing the leadership necessary to promote journalistic responsibility and freedom of expression. The publications board should further determine the requirements and qualifications for student editors and other major staff positions, ascertain the method of editor selection, and provide ways and means for continuous evaluation of student newspaper activities.

8. Student newspaper editorial freedom of expression requires student responsibility for presenting news and opinion accurately, fairly, and completely.

In addition to the position taken by the courts that newspaper content must not contain libelous or obscene material, the official positions of the seventeen organizations or groups reviewed in this study indicate that students have other responsibilities for maintaining journalistic standards. All eight of the official positions considered call for student responsibility in printing news and opinion accurately, fairly, and comprehensively. Student competency and fair judgment, the adherence to professional performance, ethics, decency, and the avoidance of libel, are emphasized. Provision for fair and adequate space for opinion differing from editorial policy and opinion is considered necessary by the organizations. Four of the official positions call for student editors to adhere to the canons of responsible journalism, and two other positions verify the desirability of such student behavior and action.

9. A professionally competent adviser for the student newspaper staff is desirable for both students and the administration.

The findings of this study indicate that the student newspaper staff should have an adviser who advises and teaches the students who participate in the process of publishing the newspaper. He should advise and inform students in matters concerning journalistic ethics and responsibilities, libel, copyright, writing and technical skills. The adviser has no authority to censor material or to establish editorial policy.

10. The student newspaper is primarily a medium of communication for students; other opportunities made possible for students who participate in newspaper activities, such as formal course instruction in writing and technical skills, are secondary.

The findings of this study indicate that whether the student newspaper is under the jurisdiction of the English teacher or organized solely as an extra-curricular activity, two concerns are paramount: (1) The newspaper serves the

interests of all students, not isolated groups of students within the high school community; and (2) The emphasis on students' acquiring writing and technical skills through participation in newspaper editing and publishing should not exceed the emphasis on their acquiring an understanding of the values of responsible free inquiry and expression.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The present conditions pertaining to the student newspaper in many high schools indicate a definite need for a realignment of institutional authority with regard to student freedom of expression. More attention and care should be taken in describing the role and function of the student newspaper because recent legal actions show that too often the high school has usurped student freedom of expression in the newspaper.

The time has come for each school's administration, faculty, and student body to make a thorough examination of both the rights and responsibilities of the student newspaper activity. Explicit guidelines must be adopted so that the high school community, as well as the community-at-large, can function effectively within a universal journalistic framework.